

Message Text

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10

ACTION OES-04

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 ERDA-05 XMB-02 COME-00 TRSE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2546

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BANGKOK 21388

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: IAEA, TECH, ENRG, TH, LA

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENTS IN THAILAND'S NUCLEAR POWER PLANT
PROJECT; ELECTRICITY FROM LAOS

REF: BANGKOK 20574 (NOTAL)

1. IN SPEECH MADE BEFORE BANGKOK LIONS CLUB OCTOBER 3, EGAT GENERAL MANAGER KASEM CHATIKAVANIT MADE FIRST RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENT ADVOCATING ESTABLISHMENT OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IN THAILAND. SPEECH HAS RECEIVED FAIRLY SUBSTANTIAL PUBLICITY, WITH SUBSEQUENT ARTICLES APPEARING TWICE IN BANGKOK POST AND ONCE IN NATION NEWSPAPERS, SO FAR WITHOUT EDITORIAL COMMENT. RTG'S PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPT. ALSO RELEASED SUMMARY OF KASEM'S STATEMENTS.

2. IN SPEECH, KASEM SAID NUCLEAR POWER IS A MUST FOR THAILAND IF THE COUNTRY IS NOT TO BE HAMPERED BY POWER SHORTAGES AND OIL PRICE INCREASES, POINTING OUT THAT WITH WORLD OIL DEMAND INCREASING BY SIX PER CENT PER YEAR, WORLD OIL RESERVES WILL BE EXHAUSTED IN 30 YEARS, AND THAT THAILAND'S CONSUMPTION OF ELECTRICITY HAS INCREASED BY NEARLY 1,000 PER CENT IN LAST DECADE.

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3. KASEM POOH-POOHED "CHILDISH FEARS" ABOUT NUCLEAR

POWER, STATING THAT IT IS SAFE AND HARARD-FREE AS CAN BE SEEN BY FACT THAT THERE HAS NOT BEEN ONE ACCIDENT IN THE ONE HUNDRED ODD NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS IN OPERATING IN THE WORLD. MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE SAID, DESPITE HIGH INITIAL INVESTMENT COSTS, NUCLEAR POWER WOULD MEAN CHEAPER ELECTRICITY WITHOUT WHICH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE RETARDED. HE SAID NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IS ONE OF SEVERAL PROJECTED SCHEMES TO COPE WITH POSSIBLE POWER SHORTAGES, OTHERS INCLUDING PROJECTED BAN CHAO NEN DAM, ELECTRICITY FROM LIGNITE, AND PURCHASE OF ADDITIONAL ELECTRICITY FROM NAN NGUM DAM IN LAOS. (IN SEPARATE STATEMENT, KASEM NOTED THAT AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED OCTOBER 6 WITH ELECTRICITY DE LAOS (EDL) TO PURCHASE NAN NGUM-GENERATED ELECTRICITY AT NEW RATE OF 10.5 U.S. MILS PER K/H, REPRESENTING INCREASE OF OVER 100 PER CENT OVER PREVIOUS RATE OF 4.5 MILS.)

4. EMBASSY OFFICER SPOKE SUBSEQUENTLY WITH PREECHA CHUNGWATANA, CHIEF OF EGAT'S ATOMIC ENERGY DIVISION, WHO AGREED THAT KASEM'S SPEECH MIGHT BE CONSIDERED PART OF AN EFFORT TO GAIN PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE AND GOVERNMENTAL APPROVAL OF NUCLEAR POWER PROJECT, WHICH EGAT HOPES TO OBTAIN PRIOR TO JANUARY WHEN TENDERS ARE SCHEDULED TO BE ISSUED (REFTEL). HE SAID HE WAS GLAD TO STATE THAT SO FAR THERE HAD BEEN REMARKABLY LITTLE ADVERSE CRITICISM OF THE SPEECH. HE SAID ONE UNNAMED MP HAD SPOKEN OUT AGAINST THE NUCLEAR PROJECT IN PARLIAMENT, BUT THAT WAS IN THE CONTEXT OF CRITICISING A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTAL PROPOSALS SO HE DIDN'T TAKE IT TOO SERIOUSLY. (NOTE: THE OCTOBER 9 BANGKOK POST CARRIED A LETTER TO THE EDITOR FROM A WESTERN READER, PRESUMABLY BRITISH, CHALLENGING KASEM'S STATEMENT THAT NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS ARE SAFE.)

5. PREECHA ALSO CONFIRMED THE NEW RATES FOR PURCHASES OF ELECTRICITY FROM EDL, AND THAT EGAT HAD AGREED TO BUY ANY SURPLUS GENERATED BY EDL'S NAM NGUM DAM. HE SAID NEW RATES WERE NOT EXORBITANT, BECAUSE OF HIGHER COSTS OF ENERGY, AND THAT OLD RATES HAD BEEN EXTREMELY LOW. IN ANY EVENT, TOTAL CAPACITY OF NAM NGUM IS INSIGNIFICANT (30,000 KW NOW, 80,000 AFTER EXPANSION), ESPECIALLY SINCE EDL IS CONCURRENTLY PURCHASING OIL-GENERATED ELECTRICITY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FROM EGAT FOR SOUTHERN LAOS AT EVEN HIGHER RATE OF 15 US MILS PER K/H.
MASTERS

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
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